

The PRINCE of GRAUSTARK

BY
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SYNOPSIS

Mr. Blithers, multi-millionaire, discusses with his wife the possibilities of marrying off his daughter, Maud Applegate, to the Prince of Graustark, who is visiting Mr. and Mrs. Truxton King in America in anticipation of getting some one to take up the loan Russia holds. A Mr. Scoville is attentive to Maud.

Prince Robin is accompanied by Count Quinnox, minister of war; Lieutenant Dank and Hobbs, the valet. The prince had balked at a matrimonial alliance with the Princess of Dawbergen, both of them wishing to choose for themselves. Mr. Blithers visits the Kings uninvited.

Mr. Blithers discusses the Russian loan and gently hints at \$20,000,000 his daughter will get when she marries the right man.

Bankers suddenly refuse to handle the loan. Count Quinnox and King arrange a meeting with Blithers. King suspects him of blocking the deal.

Blithers promises to consider the loan. His wife prepares a ball for the Prince and Maud, who suddenly balks at the affair and doesn't attend.

Meeting the prince out for a stroll, Blithers hints at matrimony. Robin says he is not for sale, but agrees to meet Maud when he learns she is opposed to her parents' wishes.

Maud again evades the prince, who reports he must leave for Graustark at once. Maud writes she is off for Europe on the Jupiter with an aged companion, her father schemes to get them both on the same ship.

The prince as Mr. Schmidt sails on the Jupiter. Blithers buys \$20,000,000 of Graustark bonds. A young lady disputes Robin's right to a table and deck chair.

He learns she is Miss Guile of New York, and her aged companion Mrs. Gaston. He soon becomes better acquainted with Miss Guile.

Her given name is Bedella, she tells him. She tells Mrs. Gaston that she suspects he is the Prince of Graustark.

Mrs. Gaston changes her manner toward him. Hobbs discovers Miss Guile's baggage is marked with a B. In Paris she is met by a young man.

Gourou, Robin's police chief, concludes that the B on the baggage means Blithers. Miss Blithers denies her engagement to the prince. Bedella signs Robin a note.

CHAPTER XIII.
The Cat Is Away.

ROBIN'S face was glowing with excitement. He put his hands in his trousers pockets and nervously jingled the coins therein, all the while regarding his minister of police with speculative eyes.

At last Robin, without speaking, impulsively held the letter out to the baron, who strode across the room and took it from his hand. Without a word he extracted the single sheet of paper and read what was written thereon:

"My motor will call for you at 3 this afternoon, and we will run out to St. Cloud for tea, at the Pavilion bleu. Mrs. Gaston is spending the day with relatives at Champs-Élysées, and we may as well be nice under the circumstances. If you have another engagement pray do not let it interfere with the pleasure I am seeking."

"Nothing could be more exacting, my dear prince. She signs herself 'B. Guile,' and I am sure she is magnificently beguiling, if you will pardon the play on words."

"It's a jolly little adventure," was all that Robin would say.

The baron was thoughtful. "There is something behind this extraordinary behavior on the part of a lady generally accredited with sense and refinement," said he after a moment. "I think I have it too. She is deliberately putting you to a rather severe test."

"Test? What do you mean?"

"She is trying you out, sir. Miss Guile, or possibly Miss Blithers—is taking a genuine risk in order to determine whether you are a real gentleman or only a make believe. She is taking a chance with you. You may call it a jolly little adventure, but I call it the acid test."

Robin laughed. "Thank you, baron. Forewarned is forearmed. I shall remain a gentleman at any cost."

At 3 o'clock a big limousine swung under the porte cochère at the Ritz and a nimble footman hopped down and entered the hotel. Robin was waiting just inside the doors.

"For Mr. Schmidt?" he inquired.

"Oui, monsieur."

Thrilled by a pleasurable sense of excitement, the Prince of Graustark entered the car.

A delicate perfume lingered in the machine, convincing proof that Miss Guile had left it but a few minutes before its arrival at his hotel. As a matter of fact, she was nearer than he thought, for the car whirled into the Rue de la Paix and stopped at the curb not more than a hundred yards from the Place Vendôme.

Once more the nimble footman hopped down and threw open the door. A slender, swift moving figure in a blue linen gown and a wide hat, from which sprang two gorgeous blue plumes, emerged from the door of a diamond merchant's shop, and, before Robin could move from his corner, popped into the car and sat down beside him with a nervous little laugh on her lips—red lips that showed rose-like and tempting behind a thick chiffon veil, obviously donned for an excellent reason. The exquisite features of Miss Guile were barely distinguishable beneath the surface of this filmy

the courage to go directly to the hotel for you," she said. "I know several people who are stopping there, and I—I—well, you won't think I'm a dreadful person, will you?"

"Not at all," he declared promptly. Then he resolved to put one of the questions he had made up his mind to ask at the first opportunity. "Do you mind telling me why you abandoned me so completely, so heartlessly, on the day we landed?"

"Because there was no reason why I should act otherwise, Mr. Schmidt," she said, the tremor gone from her voice.

"And yet you take me to St. Cloud for tea," he said pointedly.

"Ah, but no one is to know of this," she cried warmly. "This is a secret, a very secret adventure."

He could not help staring. "And that is just why I am mystified. Why is today so very different from yesterday?"

"It isn't," she said. "Doesn't all this prove it?"

He suddenly remembered the baron's shrewd conjecture and let the opportunity to say something banal go by without a word. Perhaps it was a test, after all.

"There are many things I want to speak about, Mr. Schmidt, and—and you know how impossible it is to—to get a moment to oneself when one is being watched like a child, as I am being watched over by dear Mrs. Gaston. You will understand, won't you?"

"Pray do not distress yourself, Miss Guile," he protested. "The last word is spoken. I am too happy to spoil the day by doubting its integrity."

As the car turned into the Boulevard des Capucines Robin suppressed an exclamation of annoyance on beholding Baron Gourou and Dank standing on the curb almost within arm's length of the car as it passed. The former was peering rather intently at the two men on the front seat and evinced little or no interest in the occupants of the passing tonneau.

"Wasn't that your friend Mr. Dank?" inquired Miss Guile with interest. He felt that she was chiding him.

"Yes," said he, and then turned for another look at his compatriots. Gourou was sitting in the car, and Dank was standing on the curb, looking down on the barrier. The door closed sharply and, almost before the prince had recovered from his surprise, the car glided off in the direction of the Place de l'Opéra.

"Isn't it just like an elopement?" cried Miss Guile, and it was quite plain to him that she was vastly pleased with the sprightly introduction to the adventure. Her voice trembled slightly, and she sat up very straight in the wide, comfortable seat.

"Isn't it just like an elopement?" cried Miss Guile.

"Is it really you?" cried Robin, and he was surprised to find that his own voice trembled.

"Oh," she said, with a sudden diffidence, "how do you do? What must you think of me, bouncing in like that and never once speaking to you?"

"I think that you are frightened almost out of your boots," said he boldly.

"No, I'm not," said she resolutely. "I am only conscious of feeling extremely foolish."

"I shouldn't feel that way about stealing off for a cup of tea," said he. "It's all quite regular, you know, and is frequently done in the very best circles when the cat's away."

"You see, I couldn't quite scrape up

protested. "It really isn't fair to Miss Blithers. She was justified in following an illustrious example. You forget that the Prince of Graustark was the first to rush into print with a flat denial. What else could the poor girl do?"

"Oh, I am not defending the Prince of Graustark. He behaved abominably, rushing into print, as you say. Extremely bad taste, I should call it. Still, I would be willing to make a small wager that the well advertised match comes off in spite of all the denials. Given a determined father, an ambitious mother, a purse filled daughter and an empty pursed nobleman, and I don't see how the inevitable can be avoided."

Robin's face was flaming. It was with difficulty that he restrained the impulse to put her right in the matter without further ado.

"By the way, what would you have done had you been placed in her position?"

"I think I should have acted quite as independently as she."

"If your father were to pick out a husband for you, whether or no, you would refuse to obey the paternal command?"

"Most assuredly. As a matter of fact, Mr. Schmidt, my father has expressed a wish that I should marry a man who doesn't appeal to me at all. He's cut me out. The prince mentally promised him something for his pains. But let us leave dull care behind," he went on gayly.

"Won't you be good enough to take off that veil? It seriously obstructs the view."

She complacently shook her head. "It doesn't obstruct mine," she said. "Have you been reading what the papers are saying about your friend Mr. Blithers and his obstreperous daughter, Maud?"

Robin caught his breath. In a flash he suspected an excellent reason for keeping the veil in place. He could now see that it gave her a distinct advantage over him.

"Yes. I see that she positively denies the whole business."

"Likewise the prospective spouse," she added. "Isn't it sickening?"

"By the way, it is reported that she crossed on the steamer with us."

"I am quite certain that she did, Mr. Schmidt," said she.

"You really think so?" he cried, regarding her keenly.

"The man who came to meet me knows her quite well. He is confident that he saw her at Cherbourg."

"I see," said he, and was thoroughly convinced. "I may as well confess to you, Miss Guile, that I also know her when I see her."

"But you told me positively that you had never seen her, Mr. Schmidt," she said quickly.

"I had not seen her up to the second day out on the Jupiter," he explained, enjoying himself immensely.

"It was after that that you"—

"I know," he said, as she hesitated, "but you see I didn't know she was Miss Blithers until sometime after I had met you." There was a challenge in his manner amounting almost to a declaration.

She leaned forward to regard him more intently.

"Is it possible, Mr. Schmidt, that you suspect me of being that horrid, vulgar creature?"

Robin was not to be trapped. There was something in the shadowy eyes that warned him.

"At least I may say that I do not suspect you of being a horrid, vulgar creature," he said evasively.

"You haven't answered my question, Mr. Schmidt."

"Well," he began slowly. "I don't suspect you of being Miss Blithers."

"But you did suspect it."

"I was pleasantly engaged in speculation, that's all. It is generally believed that Miss Blithers sailed under an assumed name—literally, not figuratively."

"Is there any reason why you should imagine that my name is not Guile?"

"Yes. Your luggage is resplendently marked with the second letter in the alphabet—a gory, crimson B."

"I see," she said reflectively. "You examined my luggage, as they say in the customs office. And you couldn't put B and G together, is that it?"

"Obviously."

"If you had taken the trouble to look you would have found an equally resplendent G on the opposite end of each and every trunk, Mr. Schmidt," she said quietly.

"I did not examine your luggage, Miss Guile," said he stiffly. She hadn't left much for him to stand upon. "Rather unique way to put one's initials on a trunk, isn't it?"

"And you refuse?"

"Absolutely. Now let us talk of something else. A bas Blithers! Down with the plutocrats! Stamp out the vulgarians! Is there anything else you can suggest?" she cried gayly.

"Long live the Princess Maud!" said he, and doffed his hat. The satirical note in his voice was not lost on her. She started perceptibly and caught her breath. Then she sank back into the corner with a nervous, strained little laugh.

"You think she will marry him?"

"I think as you do about it, Miss Guile," said Robin, and she was silenced.

They had a table in a cool, shady corner of the broad porch overlooking the Place d'Armes and the Seine and its vociferous ferries. To the right runs the gleaming roadway that leads to the hills and glades through which pomp and pride once strode with such fatal arrogance. Blue coated servants attended them on their arrival and watched over them during their stay. It was as if Miss Guile were the fairy princess who had but to wish and her slightest desire was gratified. Her guest, a real prince, marveled not a little at the complete sway she exercised over this somewhat autocratic army of menials. They bowed and scraped and fetched and carried. The magic of Arabys could have been no more potent than the spell this beautiful girl cast over the house of Mamon. She laid her finger upon a purse of gold and wished, and, lo, the wonders of the magic carpet were repeated.

She had removed her veil, but he was not slow to perceive that she sat with her back to the long stretch of porch.

"Do you prefer this place to Armendonville or the Pallard at Pre Catelan, Miss Guile?" he inquired, quite casually, but with a secret purpose.

"No, it is stupid here, as a rule, and common. Still every one goes to the other places in the afternoon, and I particularly wanted to be as naughty as possible, so I came here today."

"It doesn't strike me as especially naughty," he remarked.

"Are you going to take me up to the park?"

"Yes. Into the Shadows."

"Oh, that's good! I'm sure my imagination will work beautifully when it isn't subdued by all these blue devils. I—Que voulez vous? The question was directed rather sharply to a particularly deferential "blue devil" who stood at his elbow.

"M. Schmidt?"

"Yes. What's this? A letter! 'Pon my soul, how the deuce could any one'— He got no farther, for Miss Guile's action in pulling down her veil and the subsequent spasmodic glance over her shoulder betrayed such an agitated state of mind on her part that his own sensations were checked at the outset.

"There must be some one here who knows you," Mr. Schmidt," she said nervously. "See what it says, please—at once. I—perhaps we should be starting home immediately."

Robin tore open the envelope. A glance showed him that the brief note was from Gourou. A characteristic G served as a signature. As he read, a hard line appeared between his eyes and his expression grew serious.

"It is really nothing, Miss Guile," he said. "A stupid, alleged joke of a fellow who happens to know me, that's all."

"Who wrote that letter, Mr. Schmidt?" she demanded. Even through the veil he could see that her eyes were wide with—was it alarm or anger?

"A man named Gourou. He is a detective engaged on a piece of work for Mr. Totten."

"Is it a part of his duty to watch your movements?" she asked, leaning forward and reading the note.

"No. He is my friend, however," said Robin steadily. "According to this epistle, it would appear that it is a part of his duty to keep track of you, not me. May I ask why you should be shadowed by two of his kind?"

She did not answer at once. When she spoke it was with a determined effort to maintain her composure.

"I am sorry to have subjected you to all this, Mr. Schmidt. We will depart at once. I find that the cat is never away, so we can't be nice. What a fool I've been." There was something suspiciously suggestive of tears in her soft voice.

(To be Continued)

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